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SERMON XXII.

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THE GREAT PREACHER.

"AND there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots: and the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord; and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord: and he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes, neither reprove after the hearing of his ears: but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and he shall smite the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."—ISAIAH 11: 1-4.

HERE it is distinctly prophesied that our Saviour, when he should come into the world, would be peculiarly endowed, by the Holy Spirit, with wisdom, discernment, and might in speech, such as should make him a remarkable preacher.

Many other passages of the word of God show that his great work was to make atonement for sinners. But while he was to

be both a great Priest, to offer acceptable sacrifice, and a glorious King on the spiritual throne of David, he was also to be a mighty Prophet, to enlighten the minds of men, and to unfold and enforce the counsels of God.

It was thus that he himself recognized his mission: "And he said unto them, Let us go into the next towns, that I may preach there also: *for therefore came I forth.* And he preached in their synagogues throughout all Galilee." "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind; to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord."

It was very proper that He who came to honor the law by obedience and suffering, should show himself to be its mightiest expounder; that He who should redeem the souls of men from the curse of the law, should show himself master of all knowledge of the human heart, its secret, deep depravity, its darkness, its unbelief; and that he be evidently able to apply the Gospel in its clearest manifestations. In short, that he should be the *mighty master-teacher* of the world.

Manifestly, the prophet, in the text, is taking this view of the coming Redeemer.

As upon no apostle, as upon no other prophet, no other minister, "the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon *him*, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge" and of piety. Neither the plausible appearances of the self-righteous, nor the crafty designs and flattering bribes of the wicked, shall deceive or turn him aside; "but with righteousness shall he judge the poor, and reprove (argue) with equity for the meek of the earth, and with the breath of his lips shall he slay the wicked."

To turn now to the life of the Son of God, and see how wonderfully these predictions were accomplished, is our very simple object; yet, we trust, not without its attractive interest, and its rich lessons of instruction.

Let Jesus himself be our preacher to-day; let us open our ears to the words of his lips; let us see *what* he taught, and watch the *manner* by which he penetrated to the inmost hearts of men; foiling their objections, taking cavilers in the snares they had laid for him; bringing forth, in the exact time, his strong reasons with omnipotent ease and grace; here, encouraging and comforting the humble and obedient, like a loving friend, an elder brother; there, rebuking and scourging the bold and impious with a divine majesty; and, on all hands, opening the narrow way of life with the clearness, beauty, and power of radiant light from the world of glory.

I. Notice what a consummate master Jesus was of real eloquence. Of course I do not refer to the petty arts and studied rules of the professional orator and actor. He needed none of these to aid him; he was infinitely above them all. His whole demeanor was perfectly simple and natural, though earnest, discriminating, and impressive, as the pure love and complete appreciation of truth could make one.

Truth, of itself, has a grand persuasive power, as is beautifully illustrated in the success of Lycurgus, persuading the proud and wealthy Spartans to give up their lands to be equally divided among all the citizens, that, by banishing poverty and excessive wealth, and with them envy, fraud, and luxury, the inhabitants might dwell together in equality and harmony, and no preëminence or honors be given but to virtue and merit alone.

Jonathan Edwards was a mighty man in his pulpit, by the clearness of his views and statements of truth—truth in its fundamental principles, traced to their wide and harmonious relations.

Our Saviour, being omniscient, might well surpass in power all the speakers and orators of the world. He "knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man." Aside from earnestness and naturalness, his great power of eloquence consisted, first, in the clearness and completeness of his views; and secondly, in his perfect command through language of all the powers and passions of the human soul.

Say what unbelievers will, of the poetic vagueness and fragmentariness of the teachings of Jesus,* we affirm with certainty, no man was ever so simple and concise in statement, so clear in logic, so exact in quoting proof-texts. It was only when he wished to illustrate and impress his plain statements, that he drew upon poetic imagery; and then, indeed, no man could paint to the life so truly and impressively. He knew too well the dependence of thought upon language, to be careless in the use of a single word or syllable. Witness his wonderful summary of the decalogue! So short and simple, that a child can carry it in the memory, and apply it to every occasion in life; and yet so complete and comprehensive, as to include and provide for all possible cases. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it: Thou shalt

* T. Starr King says, in his reply to Dr. Nehemiah Adams, p. 13: "It was very rarely that Jesus uttered any spiritual truth in cool and abstract phraseology, in sentences that are literally true. He loved indefinite language, vast expressions, paradoxes, gorgeous imagery, vivid parables. Hardly the simplest idea passed from his mind into speech, without the ample robe and lustrous turban of Eastern imagination."

Again, p. 9: "See how fragmentary the New Testament is! How little is preserved to us of the instruction of Jesus!—very rarely any consecutive talk or conversation," etc.

love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Witness, also, his talk with Nicodemus. This cautious ruler was anxious to learn about the wonderful, the heavenly things. But Jesus brings him back, and holds his mind upon the first great truth which it was so essential for him to understand.

On the supposition that the new birth is a great and fundamental reality, which every sinner must experience in order to salvation, how was it possible for the Saviour to teach it, and insist upon it more coolly and abstractly? It is a deep, mysterious, and spiritual doctrine; as a fact, however, it is plain enough. And so the Saviour employs a bold figure, and a literal and natural fact, to make the spiritual truth more definite and plain. Though Nicodemus does not, at first, comprehend it, the Great Teacher insists upon the fact which underlies the figure: "*Verily, VERILY* I say unto thee, except a man be born of water, and of the *Spirit*, he can not enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again."

Nicodemus, in his manifest amazement, would know how it is *by the SPIRIT*. He can neither see, hear, nor handle the Spirit. Yes, says Jesus, but you can tell him by his results. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit."

I might refer, also, to the Saviour's expressed and evident desire to fulfill, carefully and to the letter, "all righteousness," all the teachings, Jewish ceremonies, and even the most minute prophecies concerning himself. But the clearness of his views and statements are so evident to the candid reader of the Gospels, that I need not dwell farther here.

Nor is the other element of our Lord's power as a preacher any the less indisputable. He knew just what chord of the human heart to touch, in order to make the soul vibrate with a keen sense of guilt, the pangs of insupportable shame and remorse, the rage of madness and fury, or with the ineffable joys of peaceful pardon, and the ravishing glory of the love of God. He could, with infinite ease, grasp the attention, call forth the fears, stimulate the hopes, and lay bare the thoughts and motives of any audience. How he could, when he chose, chain the eyes and ears, either of an individual, or of a vast assembly!

At twelve years of age, when his anxious parents, at last, found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the doctors, both "hearing them, and asking them questions," it is said: "All that heard him were astonished at his understanding and answers." And thereafter, it is said of him, that he "increased in wisdom and

stature, and in favor with God and man." Says the text: "The Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, and shall make him of quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."

After he entered publicly on his ministry, he often charmed and enraptured his hearers, holding them spell-bound by his true, pure eloquence; multitudes thronged out after him from the cities into the wilderness, for days together, that they might listen with rapt admiration to his wisdom, and hang upon "the breath of his lips." So truly did the Psalmist say: "Grace is poured into thy lips."

Neither Whitefield nor Peter the Hermit ever drew such vast and admiring crowds to hear them preach. *They*, like Demosthenes and Cicero, sought the people in the market, the forum, and places of public resort. *He* drew them, by thousands and tens of thousands, into deserts, and upon mountains, so far from markets that they would have perished by hunger, if he had not miraculously fed them.

We read, in history, of the grand, triumphal returns of the Scipios to Rome, and of the proud pageants of conquerors. But no king, after victorious battle, ever rode into his capital in greater triumph, than did he into Jerusalem, after one of his preaching tours through the villages. And none was ever more admired by the shouting multitudes. "A very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strewed them in the way. And the multitude that went before and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest. And when he was come into Jerusalem," and the great procession moved through its principal streets with every demonstration of joy and adoration, "all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? And the multitude replied, This is Jesus, the Prophet, (that is, Teacher,) of Nazareth of Galilee."

Entering into the temple, the buyers and sellers and money-changers fled before him, trembling more from his stern voice and majestic air, than from the scourge which he held in his hand. Then he gathered the children around him, and so interested and impressed them that they shouted in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" and thus sorely displeased the chief priests and scribes.

Often his enemies were in secret council to take him, because they saw him drawing and swaying all classes of the people. And as often, when they sought to take him, no man dared to lay hands on him, lest the people should rise up in his defense. On one occasion, they sent officers to take him, who, coming near, paused a moment to listen. Ah! dangerous hesitation, so far as their mission is concerned. They are in the power of a tongue that can, by glorious revelations, by thoughts that speak and words that burn, charm the dullest ear, and melt the hardest

heart. While they stand in the crowd, bending forward to listen, he throws a spell of deep, questioning mystery over them all. He is addressing the people about his speedy return to his Father in Heaven. "Yet a little while am I with you, and then I go unto him that sent me; ye shall seek me, and shall not find me; and where I am, thither ye can not come."

A low, colloquial murmur runs through all the assembly: "Whither will he go, that we shall not find him? What manner of saying is this that he said, Ye shall seek me, and shall not find me?" But while they reason among themselves, lo, every eye suddenly turns to him; for the moment is come for him to reveal to them, by a striking emblem, the great object of his coming into the world.

According to the Jewish custom, on the last day of the feast, Jesus now draws pure water from the cask, provided and placed conspicuously, and as he holds it forth, offering it to the multitude, he cries: "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." And then doubtless goes on, with a burning eloquence such as the two disciples on the way to Emmaus drank from his lips, to expound the prophecies concerning himself, and to unfold beautifully and clearly the glorious plan of salvation. His voice rings out, clear and sweet, on the ear of the breathless throng; I am this water of life for your souls! Your Redeemer, who shall soon pour out his blood for you, stands before you! By simply believing on me, ye may all drink of this fountain, and have eternal life! By penitently receiving me as your Saviour and your righteousness, ye may all be pardoned, freed from the power and dominion of sin and sorrow, and gloriously raised with me to Paradise!

The officers have lost all their courage to take him. Their consciences have been awakened; their hopes and fears have been roused; their souls, trembling with a sense of sin, and of perishing need of just such a Saviour, have been lifted far upwards towards the spiritual world. They return sadly and silently, and when questioned, "Why have ye not brought him?" they can only reply: "O sirs, *never*, NEVER man spake like this man!"

Thus as earth's most eloquent and mighty preacher, we see that the prophecy of the text was fulfilled. "The Spirit of the Lord did rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord."

"How sweetly flowed the Gospel sound
From lips of gentleness and grace,
When listening thousands gathered round,
And joy and reverence filled the place!"

"From heaven he came, of heaven he spoke,
To heaven he led his followers' way;
Dark clouds of gloomy night he broke,
Unveiling an immortal day."

II. Consider how plainly and forcibly our Saviour preached the great doctrines or fundamental facts of the Gospel system. For, be assured, his eloquence was the farthest possible from the mere hortatory and superficial. He aimed not to astonish and please; but to instruct, impress and save. All his teachings have their foundation, manifestly, in the few, first principles of the Gospel. His object in every conversation, every sermon, every trope, every figure and parable, was to set forth doctrine, and through it, duty, more and more distinctly and vividly. He always assumed that obligations grow out of relations; and that men are so constituted, that they only can feel the one in proportion as they see and realize clearly the other; that is, there can really be no practical preaching without doctrinal.

It is a great mistake, to suppose we must look to the writings of the Apostles in order to find the Calvinistic doctrines most clearly stated and taught. Paul has, perhaps, elaborated them more into the forms of logic; giving the processes of his reasoning more abstractly. But he certainly affirmed and taught them not half so distinctly and vividly, as did the Great Teacher. Where do we find the doctrine of universal, ruinous Depravity brought out so distinctly as in his preaching? It underlies and renders necessary all his atoning work. "The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was *lost*." "The whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick." "A good tree can not bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit." "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him."

We have seen, in the case of Nicodemus, with what energy he taught the doctrine of Regeneration by the Holy Spirit.

So also the Divine Sovereignty, how clearly it stands out in the parable of the laborers, closing with: "Friend, I do thee no wrong: Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? So the last shall be first, and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen." We find on one occasion, that he brought this much-hated doctrine home so pungently, that the people could not endure it. His friends in Nazareth desired him to honor his own town with his mighty works. "Whatsoever we have heard done in Capernaum, do also here in thy country." He replies: "Many widows were in *Israel* in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land. But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow. And many lepers were in *Israel*, in the time of Elisæus the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, saving Naaman the Syrian. And all they in the synagogue, when they heard these things, were filled with wrath, and rose up and thrust him out of the city, and led him unto the brow of the hill, whereon their city was built, that they might cast him down headlong."

And so it was throughout his preaching. It will be found, by digging downward a little, that the cardinal doctrines of grace, none of them omitted, none of them softened or pared away, constitute the substratum of all his teachings. And for this reason, we need no further to particularize under this head. Wherever we turned for illustrations of his eloquence, we found the distinguishing doctrines dropping naturally and copiously as the rain in vernal showers, which must so surely precede the bloom of summer and the fruits of autumn. And we shall meet them, on every hand, as we turn now,

III. To the *peculiar manner* and *amazing power* of the Saviour's preaching.

And here, we find the field opening so widely before us, that we can only indicate a few of his various and vast resources. We may begin with mentioning his strange faculty of holding the minds of his hearers steadily to the one simple truth which he was urging, separating it from all others, and causing whatever questions or circumstances came in his way to throw new light, ray after ray, upon it, until it occupied the whole field of vision and thought.

However his hearers, as Nicodemus and the woman of Samaria, sought to change the subject, and wander from the first principles to which he saw it important to hold them, he still found means, often where they least expected it, to bring back their thoughts, or call up the same theme under a different form or dress, until, finally, he fixed all thought and feeling upon it, and secured the desired impression.

When he perceives the Samaritan woman so ready to ask, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not," with little or no conviction of sin, he says to her: "Go call thy husband." This opens the dark picture of her guilty life, and she begins to feel her need of the spiritual water of cleansing. Yet the convicting sight of her life is unwelcome and painful to dwell upon, and she seeks to turn from it by starting the mooted question about Mount Gerizim. He allows her no escape, but deepens her convictions by adding God's claim to true, spiritual worship. She, still seeking to excuse herself for the present, replies, "When Messiah cometh, I shall be ready for that. What now is there left for her but to believe, when Jesus, with emphasis declares: "I that speak unto thee am he." It is enough; the conclusion is reached; she leaves her water-pot in her joyous haste, like a true convert, to call her neighbors: "Come, see a man which told me all things that ever I did; is not this the Christ?"

Again there seems to be this striking difference between the Lord Jesus and all other preachers: *They* receive the truth by revelation, and seek to demonstrate it by reason and argument. *He* announ-

ces it by direct knowledge and authority. It requires no effort on his part to make it real. The spiritual world is all unveiled to him: he sees what he represents. Hence there is a vividness in his delineations which is often startling. He declares the truth plainly, and then feels at liberty to paint it as on canvas; yea, to exhibit and enact it to the very life, as in a drama. He builds a stage, and calls up his actors, who set it before us in such thrilling scenes that we can neither misunderstand, or ever forget it.

A few examples will make very plain this peculiar manner and astonishing power of The Great Preacher.

Every true minister of the Gospel meets continually with one great difficulty, that of persuading men that their future, eternal condition, really depends upon the choice of doctrine and life which they make in this world. Until this is gained, commonly, nothing is gained. The sense of right, and the desire for future happiness, are not sufficient to weigh against present impulses. Man's natural indolence, and love of an irreligious life, together with the temptations of pleasure, and the pressing cares of business, will blind his eyes to the great realities of the spiritual world, for which he is on trial in this short, probationary state. Now see how our Saviour sets himself to meet this difficulty, and to teach effectually the momentous doctrine of Hell as a reality, and of the absolute necessity of a right and earnest use of the divinely appointed means of grace, in order to escape that awful state. Not only does he repeatedly announce the existence of the place, "where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched;" not only does he solemnly declare, "Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish;" but for the purpose of enforcing the plain statement, he also presents before his hearers a thrilling dramatic exhibition of it.

Scene first is laid in this world. The curtain rises, and you behold an elegant, oriental mansion, just such as eastern travelers describe, and as the Jewish mind must have been familiar with. The mansion is provided with all the comfort, and adorned with all the beauty, that wealth and art can afford. Gay birds sing in the tasteful arbors; delicate and fragrant flowers bloom along the gracefully winding walks; in the gardens, luxurious fruits, of every clime and season, tempt the palate and remind you of ancient paradise. The happy and cultivated inhabitants, even to the many servants, are clothed richly, and fare sumptuously every day. And yet God, the giver of all, is not in their thoughts; the Bible is not there read and obeyed; no secret closet of penitence and prayer, no family altar is known; no consecration to God's work, in this great harvest-world, is thought of! The mansion, with its Eden-like appearance, is surrounded by a massive wall, with frowning battlements; and through the iron-trellised gate, the poor passers-by pause to look in with longing envy, and turn away, with a tear and at sigh at their own sad lot, saying bitterly:

"Ah! misery stole me at my birth,
And cast me helpless on the wild.
I perish! O my mother earth!
Take home thy child."

As you continue to look and wonder, our Great Teacher heightens the contrast of the scene, by painting, with a few delicate touches, a poor beggar, lying outside the gates, full of sores, and in all the misery of friendlessness, pining hunger, and loathsome disease. Through the tattered rags that enfold him, the dogs, as they pass, in sheer animal pity, stop a moment to lick his sores. Driven from all hope in this world, (and it is in this way that, while the prosperous make excuse, the poor, the maimed, and the unfortunate, are often "compelled to come in" that heaven may be full,) he penitently acknowledges the guilt of his wayward heart and life, lifts his eyes and his soul to heaven, and prays for the pity and pardon of the Friend of sinners, asking humbly for a home with God, and the riches of a holy and eternal life.

As the curtain falls on this scene, you are ready to say, Surely, in this world, the ways of God to men are not equal; there must be a day of judgment, with its balancing of accounts, by future rewards and punishments. And this is just the conviction which the Great Preacher wished to fix deeply. But he is not done with the theme; he has other doctrines which he wishes to bring impressively forth.

Again the curtain rises, and the scene is all changed; you are now in a new and unfamiliar place! Here, in the middle, yawns an impassable gulf! And on its opposite sides, what an infinite contrast! On the right hand, you behold Lazarus with Abraham, surrounded by the happy throng in God's most glorious home! On the left, you see Dives, his face the picture of woe, lifting up his eyes and his voice from the depth of torment, and pleading for one drop of water to cool his parched tongue! And when, at last, he despairs of mitigating his own wretched condition, the third scene opens with a view of both this world and the future!

In the distance, on the earth, we can descry the rich men's five brethren, living with their families, in careless affluence, neglecting religion as though there were no other life but the present. They have the Old Testament Scriptures in their houses; prophets and ministers reason with them and warn and entreat them; but they listen to no good purpose. Now they feign to doubt the evidence of God's word; then they give to it a milder and less disturbing interpretation. Sometimes they employ a false prophet, some ingenious and plausible man, to aid in allaying the forebodings which will sometimes spring up within them. Sometimes in sickness or at a funeral, they admit the truth; but, after forming some good resolutions of future repentance and change of life and aim, they soon fall back again into the cares and the pleasures of

their former religionless life, and seem bent upon the pursuits of time and sense!

We turn from them to the other world, and oh! what a dialogue is going on there! We see, and even hear Dives pleading importunately with Abraham, that, at least, Lazarus may be sent to his brothers, to testify, from his actual knowledge of both worlds, "lest they also come into this place of torment." Abraham replies: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham, but if one went unto them from the dead, they *will* repent." But the affecting reply of the glorified patriarch closes his eyes and sinks his soul to utter, indescribable despair. "If they hear not Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rose from the dead." The ordinary means of grace will never be substituted by others; there is no other help, no other hope!

And now, as the drama closes, and we awake to our reflections, how many of us are constrained to feel that we are purposely represented by the five brethren! that we are enacting, over and over, the same scenes in our lives!

Oh! what a preacher was Jesus! How the several doctrines stand out in his sermons, with a clearness and vividness altogether unparalleled! He states his theme plainly and simply, where there is need of it; then paints it or enacts it, to the very life; and holding the striking picture or scene up before us, he makes us see, as in a mirror, our characters, our lives, our obligations, our necessities and privileges. Surely "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might," did rest upon him, peculiarly.

What an example of the power of unfolding and enforcing truth is found in the parable of the Prodigal Son! We never weary with hearing it. It loses none of its freshness and weight by repetition; but at each successive reading, it deepens the general impression, and gives us new thoughts and new feelings. Like hundreds of young men, in every age, the son is eager to grasp his inheritance, and escape from the restraints of a religious home. Little does he realize the longing anxiety of the father's heart, as he receives that farewell kiss at the door. Little does he fear the temptations and dangers which are before him, as he hastens away from the lingering gaze of his loving parent, with a light step and a bounding heart.

Next you see him in a distant land, home long forgotten; having spent all in riotous living, he is reduced to the extremity of feeding swine. "And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat, and no man gave unto him." So it is ever. The young man that has spent all in the dram-shop, or the house of pleasure, is turned into the streets to die; those who have robbed him will not give a morsel of bread.

In this perishing condition, God sends some benevolent Christian,

or society, to find him; The Holy Spirit quickens in him the remembrance of the religious instructions of his early home. "He comes to himself." He starts to his feet with the energy of one who feels that it is the last chance. "My father's servants have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger. I will arise and go to my father, and say unto him, Father I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." See here the humility, the consecration, the gratitude of *every* true penitent. He is willing to *be* any thing, *do* any thing, that may please his father. "The dogs eat of the crumbs that fall from their master's table." "I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness."

"But while he was yet a great way off, the father" (who has been always watching and waiting anxiously for his return) sees him approaching. Through his rags the father's love recognizes his son. He rushes from the house saying: There is *my son*! It is, it *is* my son! He is coming to his home at last! He runs and falls upon his neck, and kisses him! He utters no reproaches, exacts no pledges; but calls for the robe, the ring, and the shoe, to put on him, kills the fatted calf, and calls in his neighbors to rejoice and make merry with him; for, "this, my son, was dead and is alive, was lost and is found."

Henceforth no poor erring soul need fear lest he be refused or reproved. None need delay to make themselves better. None, however guilty, or however deeply convicted, need to despair. Clothed in rags, bankrupt in character, and nothing to remember but a life of ingratitude and folly, any penitent soul may come, saying:

"Just as I am, without one plea,
But that thy blood was shed for me,
And that thou bidst me come to thee,
O Lamb of God, I come!

"Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come!

"Just as I am—*thy* LOVE unknown
Hath broken every barrier down;
Now, to be thine, yea, thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come!"

We might refer also to that tremendous sermon which the Lord Jesus preached in relation to our responsibility for the right use of money and opportunities. A great prince, after delivering his goods in trust to his servants, commanding them to occupy till he returns, travels into a distant country. So God, having committed great trusts to us, seems to have retired from us, to leave

us to our choice. Some, after waiting awhile, begin to say: "Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were." Christians sometimes do not find him. They cry: "Oh! that I knew where I might find him; that I might come even to his seat!" But, "after a long time, the lord of those servants cometh and reckoneth with them."

How solemn and fearful must the closing scene of this drama have been, when they saw the "unprofitable" servant—not the profane, or the vicious, but the simply *unprofitable* servant—cast into outer darkness! Who, then, could have hoped to be guiltless?

So also the parable of the sower going forth to sow, so large a portion of the ground being utterly unfit to receive the seed! What a blow must it have been to his profitless and carping hearers! And who that reads the parable, can ever be indifferent as to his responsibility in the hearing of sermons?

The Saviour's life also shows that much is meant, in the text, by his being endowed with the spirit of "counsel." How deep and crafty were his enemies! how dark and treacherous their plots to entangle him, and get some advantage over him! We are told that the chief priests and scribes "watched him, and sent forth spies, who should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of his words, that so they might deliver him unto the power and authority of the governor."

Doubtless his disciples often trembled when they saw the cunning hatred with which he was pursued. But he was never surprised or confused by them, even for a moment. Who ever knew so well how to take the wise in their own craftiness, and by a sentence or two confound them in their studied devices, and send them away abashed, so that "no man durst ask him any more questions!"

With what ease he saw through the casuistry about the tribute money to Cæsar! With what consummate skill did he turn the Old Testament Scriptures with stunning force upon the Sadducees, who denied any existence after death, either of body or spirit! They, however, boasted of their belief in the Old Testament. Says our Saviour, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, can not be the God of the *dead*, but of the *living*.

Then, when silenced on their own chosen field, they turn to philosophy, and start difficulties growing out of the future adjustment of the family relations. He is equally ready to meet them. "Ye do err, not knowing (either) the Scriptures, or the power of God; for in the resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels of God."

Oh! if we could have witnessed their downcast looks, and heard the jeers and taunts of the multitude, (for the Pharisees, and probably the great majority of the people, believed in a resur-

rection,) the scene would exalt our ideas of the Saviour's astonishing might in counsel, and his "quick understanding in the fear of the Lord."

Not less astonishing was his withering power of rebuke and denunciation. As we follow along the bright track of the life of the Son of God, we find ample evidence of the fulfillment of the prophecy in the text, in his ability to "smite the earth with the rod of his mouth," and to "slay the wicked with the breath of his lips."

I do not believe there ever was, before or since, such severe exposure, such terrible reproof, as that recorded in the twenty-third chapter of Matthew. The language was so just and true, that is, came so fully up to the truth of their hypocrisy and guilt, that, in the presence of the multitudes who had suffered so much from their extortion and robbery, under the guise of religion, it must have fallen like poisoned arrows and hot thunderbolts, upon the defenseless heads of those proud and haughty men of influence and authority, who were so unaccustomed to be told of their crimes to their faces.

They now encountered a preacher who had the calm courage to judge not after the sight of his eyes, nor reprove after the hearing of his ears; but with righteousness to judge for the poor, and reprove with equity in favor of the meek of the earth, and slay the wicked with the breath of his lips. "Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering, to go in. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation. Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is made, ye make him two-fold more the child of hell than yourselves. Wo unto you, ye blind guides! ye fools and blind! for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple which sanctifieth the gold? Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel! Wo unto you, whited sepulchers! Ye serpents! ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

No prophet or apostle ever spake like that. The invective of Demosthenes against Philip is weak as water, compared to this. If you could have seen that stern, piercing, majestic look, and heard those terrific sentences, you would have trembled, and thought of the day of judgment, and of the authoritative announcement of eternal doom! Well may John, in Revelation, say of him: "Out of his mouth went a sharp, two-edged sword; and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength."

And if he was indeed a "*son of thunder*" to the wicked, so was

he equally a "*son of consolation*" to the meek and obedient. The broken and agitated spirit was as truly subject to him, as were the stormy waves of the Sea of Galilee. The deep and holy peace of Mary Magdalen's forgiven soul must have been like the calm, sweet rising of the sun, upon the fields and flowers of spring, after a dark and tempestuous night.

How tender and sympathizing were his words, as he walked with Martha and Mary, and their mourning friends, towards the grave of Lazarus! Tears fall from his eyes, and groans heave his breast, as he points them to the resurrection, and says: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." And when, at the grave, the Jews witnessed his deep emotions, they said: "Behold how he loved him!"

His touching farewell address to his disciples, breathes the very balm of healing and consolation to their afflicted hearts. "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you."

And though he has gone to prepare mansions for his people, thousands of them who are yet on the earth can testify to his great power to "judge the cause of the poor, to argue with equity for the meek of the earth," and be to them "an elder brother," and a "friend that sticketh closer than a brother." Hear him saying, even now: "Lo! I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

"Always with us, always with us—
Words of cheer and words of love—
Thus the risen Saviour whispers,
From his dwelling-place above.

"With us, when we toil in sadness,
Sowing much and reaping none;
Telling us that in the future
Golden harvests shall be won.

"With us, when the storm is sweeping
O'er our pathway dark and drear,
Waking hope within our bosom,
Stilling every anxious fear.

"With us, in the lonely valley,
When we cross the chilling stream,
Lighting up the steps to glory,
With salvation's radiant beam."

SERMON XXIII.

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THE CHURCH OF CHRIST THE TEMPLE OF GOD.

"WHETHER is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?"—MATT. 23 : 17.

IN the former days, Jerusalem was known as the City of God; the mountain of his holiness. Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, was Mount Zion, the City of the great King. God was known in her palaces for a refuge. There too was built the temple, the house of the Lord, whither the tribes went up unto the testimony of Israel, to give thanks unto the name of the Lord. This city lying on the hills of Salem, with its formidable battlements and towers, was both the wonder and the envy of surrounding nations, but the pride of the Hebrew, his happy home, which he preferred above his chief joy. The temple was of fair proportions, adorned with goodly stones and gifts, finished and furnished within and without with great beauty of workmanship and costliness of material. It was filled with vessels and symbols and ornaments, whose value could not be computed. The house itself was overlaid within with pure gold. But the gold and the silver and the precious stones, whose profusion filled the temple with so much splendor, did not constitute, or impart to it, its true value. Its real value consisted in the simple fact that it was the dwelling-place of God. There, in the holy of holies, above the mercy-seat, rested the mysterious symbol of the divine presence—the visible glory of Deity. There, the great Jehovah promised to meet and commune with his chosen ones. There were all the people to come and pay unto God their vows, and do outward homage to his holy name. There, generation after generation had they communed with him, beheld his glory, and felt his power. For such reasons the temple was held in most sacred regard by the whole people; it was to them of all other places the most holy; the place of their highest joy. And so the psalmist, in the spirit of a true worshiper, exclaims: "How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; we shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, even of thy holy temple." Thus was the temple consecrated, as it was the dwelling-place of God; and so did the temple sanctify the gold and the precious stones, the ornaments and outward adornments, which beautified the house of the Lord.

Now, since this material temple has accomplished its purpose, a spiritual house, of which it was the type, supplies its place. Since the ending of Christ's visible ministry, Jerusalem ceased to be the only appointed place of worship; and God thenceforth chose for his dwelling a spiritual temple, into which as living stones all true worshipers are builded. The Christian Church is God's invisible, spiritual house; composed of that innumerable company, sifted from successive generations, who are called the chosen of God; being built on the foundation of apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord; in whom all true believers are builded for an habitation of God through the Spirit. However scattered and divided in name this Church may be, it is still one building, whose spiritual beauty and grace shall more and more clearly appear; for God's promise of old is sure of fulfillment, wherein he says: "I will lay thy stones with fair colors, and thy foundation with sapphires. And I will make thy windows of agates, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy borders of pleasant stones." The elements of this spiritual house, having been made partakers of the life of Christ, are living stones; they constitute one vast temple, spiritually glorious and beautiful to the eye of faith, in which God is truly worshiped, in which he takes up his abode, and manifests his glory far more wonderfully than he did in the material temple of the olden time.

Now, as in other days, the temple had its gold and silver, and its manifold adornments, its rites and ceremonies, its offices and services; and these were the ways and forms in which religious life expressed itself in that age; so now, the spiritual temple composed, not of gold and goodly stones, but of souls redeemed, alive by union with Christ, gives one kind of expression to its spiritual life, in all those things which give visibility to the Church, its houses of worship, its services and sacraments, its offices and outward order. But these things are to the Christian Church what the gold and goodly stones and gifts were to the temple. Of old, the temple was consecrated because God made it the place of his peculiar dwelling; and so it sanctified all that pertained to it. So whatever there is of form and order, which may be needful for the manifestation of spiritual religion, or necessary to show forth its nature and power, is now of real value only because each individual Christian, and all together, constitute the temple of God, in which he dwells, as the home and sanctuary of his holiness in the world.

It will be observed, then, that this spiritual temple is complete in itself, and in reality needs not these visible tokens to give it perfection. The true Church of Christ is therefore the invisible habitation of God; made up of living material, a spiritual house, in which all true prayer and praise, all holy desires and affections, are individual offerings, spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by

Jesus Christ. All that is external and visible, its forms and order, its services and sacraments and solemn assemblies, are but the means of showing forth its influence and its power, its conflicts and its victories. These things are sanctified and rendered significant by the fact that they are the visible proofs of that invisible building of God, which he has chosen for his dwelling-place. They are but the gold and gifts of the temple, infinitely less than the temple, and not even necessary to its existence or perfection.

That these visible things are not essential to the completeness of the Church, appears from the nature or character of the component parts of this invisible house. They have been made alive from the dead through faith in Christ; for he is the believer's life. They have a living union with him separately and conjointly, by virtue of which union all spiritual life is continued and nourished and invigorated. He is the vine, they are the branches; from him as the body all true life flows into them as the branches. They are in him by faith, and he dwells in them; for whosoever hath the Son hath life. They are individually and collectively complete in him, who is the head. The Scriptures every where assert the doctrine that Christianity is a thing of life; that the Church is a living thing, drawing its life continually from Christ, the great fountain of spiritual life. If there were but one true believer in Christ, united to him by a living faith, he would constitute the Church; he would be God's building, and those sacred words of the Apostle would still be true: "Know you not, that *you* are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"

It is ever to be remembered that they only are of the true Church of God, and constitute his spiritual house, in whose hearts religion has a real life. This life, strictly spiritual in its nature, has a kind of visibility wholly distinct from the services and sacraments and outward order of different Christian communities. For, since religion has a life and growth, as truly as any other thing that lives and grows, it must have some natural forms which are inseparable from it. The *principle of religious* life is one and the same, wherever it is found; the forms which are sometimes called religion are many and various. And though we never find true spiritual life without some form, yet we often find some forms of it without the life. In this respect it has many resemblances in the living world around us. All life without us is known only by our sensible apprehension of its forms. The principle of life we never see; it is an invisible agency, the working of which appears to us in the flower, the tree, the man. These are its forms, its attributes, its properties, or whatever else you please to call them; the bodies in which the vital energy exists and works. And yet how often do we find these forms of life without their living power. The flower may be preserved,

unchanged in all its parts; the delicate hues unfaded, the glistening greenness of its leaf the same; and yet the tender-looking thing be stark in death. The stately tree which breathed its life out under the hard frosts of winter, may have the same form unchanged in summer as when it went to sleep in autumn. How often do we see in the human form in death a startling resemblance to that same form when full of life:

"Thus a false smile will play around the dead,
And flush the features when the soul has fled."

So it is sometimes with the forms of religion; they may appear when there is no spirit, nor life, nor power of religion—the body of religion without the soul of it—and it may be so perfect in shape and members as to deceive the eyes of men, and make them think it does really live and grow by the energy of a spiritual life within. But the natural forms of religion, which are inseparable from it, and are essential to the manifestation of its life, and which sometimes appear when there is no spiritual life, are the graces of the Christian character. Being united to Christ, partaking of his divine life, the Christian grows into him; he puts on Christ, really resembles him in moral character. These elements of Christian character are the peculiar but natural forms, with which God has invested the principle of vital godliness. They appear in a greater or less degree of moral beauty and perfection, according to the power or energy of the divine life in the souls of those who constitute the spiritual house of God. When a vital union with Christ is once established, and spiritual life has its beginning in the soul, then do the graces of the Spirit appear to be the natural production of that union. The principle of religious life, like the principle of life wherever found, produces and perfects its own essential forms. Thus do those who are truly united to Christ continually grow in him, or experience the increase of their spiritual life; ever advancing towards perfection in him; by whom all his peculiar people, fitly joined together into one harmonious church, grow continually towards completeness and spiritual maturity. Now it is because religion is one and the same in its life principle; and because it is nourished and invigorated from the same source and by fixed laws, bringing forth in all the same essential forms of its life, that there can be one harmonious Church, embracing all that invisible company, chosen from among all peoples in all ages, who have a living faith in Christ. They resemble each other in the great essential attributes of Christian character; they are quickened by the same Spirit; they are members of Christ's body; they are the living stones of God's spiritual house. All similarity of character, and oneness of spirit, and grace of spiritual architecture, arise from the sameness and divine origin of individual religious life.

The forms of religious life which have now been alluded to are essential to the manifestation of that life, and can not be altogether separated from it. And those who possess this life and its attendant forms, are God's peculiar people; they constitute the Church of the first-born, whose names are enrolled in heaven.

But it has already been intimated that the spiritual temple, the true Church of Christ gives expression to one form of its spiritual life, in all those services, and sacraments, and offices, and outward order, which render it a visible Church. And that these things are to God's spiritual house what the gold and goodly stones and gifts were to the temple of old; they are immeasurably less than the real Church; they are not necessary to its completeness or its existence.

While there is general authority in the Scriptures for the organization of visible churches, with forms of worship, and modes of administering sacraments, and methods of government, these are not to be relied upon as sources or means of spiritual life. They may be suited to our infirmities, they may be helps to our devotions, encouragements to faithfulness, and instruments of good to a world lying in wickedness; but they can not give increase to our religious life, or, independently of real communion with Christ, advance us in any degree towards maturity of Christian character. The forms which give visibility to the Church have in them no life; nor does their existence imply religious life in those who use them. So far as they are of human origin and construction, they are dead as any other forms which human hands can make. Men may imitate a living thing in stone or brass, or on the canvas, but they can not breathe into it a living soul. So, however beautiful, or imposing, or simple, or useful, however ancient or ridiculous these borrowed forms of religion may be, they are utterly destitute of all life-imparting power; nay, in themselves considered, they are as dead as the meanest picture of death himself. They derive all their significance from the fact, that they are used as means of manifesting to the world the character and power of the invisible Church, of which Christ is the only source of life.

The forms of worship, the manner of administering the sacraments, and the kinds of government, differ in different Christian communities. They are to be regarded as aids to devotion, and encouragements to fidelity, and as a means of holding forth the light and knowledge of salvation to the world. But they are not to be regarded as possessing in themselves any life-giving energy. They can at best be only a means of directing the humble mind to that great source of vital power, from whence all true and spiritual life descends.

Prayers, whether read, or recited from memory, or dictated at the moment of utterance, are but different forms, and nothing in

themselves but words; and as such one may have no preëminence above another. It matters not where or when men pray, or whether with this form or that, or without any, if each prayer begins with a sincere desire of the heart. The sigh of the truly penitent is no sooner breathed, than it reaches up to heaven to the ever attentive ear of Him who hears the humble when they cry. True worship consists not in mere words, by whomsoever uttered; not in attractive or imposing ceremonies, accompanied with rich and varied music, and men in mystic vestments. Such were the forms of religion for a semi-barbarous people, and are now two thousand years behind the age. It is not the form which some call beautiful that constitutes true spiritual worship; it consists, rather, in the beauty of holiness. We ought to be jealous of any kind of so-called worship, which so occupies our minds with its forms, as to satisfy us with that which is sensible rather than spiritual; remembering that God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth. As the temple was greater than the gold, which ornamented and adorned it, so is the spiritual, invisible temple greater than any forms of worship which pertain to the visible Church, which can neither give nor increase life to those who constitute the body of Christ, and live alone by virtue of their union with him.

Again: the manner in which the sacraments of the Church are administered, can neither impart spiritual life, nor increase the life of the true Christian. Indeed, the sacraments themselves, baptism and the Lord's supper, are not absolutely necessary to the salvation of men, as some vainly affirm. The one is a seal of God's covenant with his people, and a rite of initiation into the visible Church: the other is an affecting memorial of the death of Christ. These sacraments have in them no life, no power, by whomsoever or in whatever way they may be administered. If they have in themselves no quickening, saving power, of how far less importance is the manner of their administration. Are those who compose that spiritual temple, built up of lively stones, better fitted for their place in that habitation of God, because in the right of baptism their foreheads were signed with the sign of the cross; or because they were plunged beneath a flood of waters; or because they were but simply sprinkled with this emblem of purification? Certainly not. Baptism, by whomsoever administered, in any or every possible way, neither washes away sin, nor imparts spiritual life. So, too, the bread and cup, which are set forth as emblems, and emblems only, of the body and blood of Christ, can not raise the sinner who receives them, from spiritual death into newness of life. They do make the gold greater than the temple, who exalt these sacraments into the instrument and means of spiritual regeneration and life. They think more of the body of religion, and the decorations of that body, than the soul of it; more of its outward ceremonies than its inward life.

Again : the order or government of the visible Church is, for the most part, of human arrangement, and is, therefore, to the Church invisible, as the gold and outward adornments to the temple. No particular form of ecclesiastical order has any efficiency or direct agency in the salvation of the soul. No one, therefore, may find spiritual life in one form, rather than another. It is not in *this* or *that*, or any *form*. He only, that believeth in the Lord Jesus Christ, shall be saved. He that is joined to the Lord, united to him by a living faith, receives his spirit, and becomes a partaker of the divine nature. And when false teachers arise and say, lo! here is Christ, or lo! there, believe them not. Christ himself declares that the kingdom of God cometh not with observation; it is not confined to one place or form: the living truth is a free spirit, omnipotent and immortal, whose home is the invisible habitation of God. The authority of the Church is in Christ; it has never been transmitted to men of certain names or office, in the visible Church. So long as the worship and services of a Christian community are conducted decently, and in order, there can be no lawful exercise of authority, one over another. For where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. No authority can be derived from tradition; from the corrupt usage of corrupt men in corrupt times; from records of unreal and shadowy men, sometimes called the Fathers. It can be found alone in the teachings of Him, who is the head and life of the Church invisible and universal.

There are those who claim for the Church on earth an outward uniformity and visible unity, consisting in fixed forms and ceremonies, and a threefold order of priesthood. These things may indeed belong to a visible Church, but they are not Christianity; they are no part of the true Church; they are not necessary to its existence or perfection. They are not necessary to the life of religion in the hearts of men, or for its advancement in the world. We may safely say, that while the true spirit of Christ is in the hearts of his people, there may never exist *such* a visible universal Church, embracing all who are and shall be the chosen of God, and builded into that glorious temple which he has made his resting-place and the home of his holiness. It is not necessary for the incoming and progress of God's spiritual kingdom in the world, that the Church should be one in its visible form; nor is there any evidence in Scripture or reason, that such will ever be the case in this world, subject as it must be to so many diversities and imperfections. It is true that our Lord prayed that his people might be one, and so they may be in religious principle, and in the simple and inseparable forms of religious life; but they never will be in ecclesiastical visibility, nor was this intended. It will be composed of that invisible company, "a part of which have crossed the flood, and part are crossing now," perpetually increasing with passing generations, which, sanctified and purified by the

blood and truth of Christ, he will present to himself at last, a glorious Church, divinely beautiful, holy and without blemish. This inspired thought can not refer to any mere visible Church, embracing a part only of the elect of God. It should be considered also, that the visible unity, or outward uniformity of a Church is no evidence of its inward purity or its spiritual life. Indeed, the true life of religion would be likely to disappear beneath the burden and bondage of fixed forms and ceremonies. In such circumstances, the unity and peace of a Church might continue for ages, showing to the world a mere formal Christianity, unmoved by those causes which sometimes disturb the quiet of others, whose forms are fewer and unfixed, and are often changed or displaced by the energy and force of an inward life. A religion of mere forms and names, is dead; it may continue outwardly the same, generation after generation, until some vital energy finds its way into it. Dead things of this sort do not change. But a church is none the better for its outward unity, and its magnificent and beautiful forms, if it have no inward life, and no beauty of holiness. "A living dog is better than a dead lion." A living tree, though it shows about it some unnatural offshoots, some crooked growths, yet, if its branches bear some pleasant fruit, is far better than a dead tree of stately form and formal stateliness, whose heart is rotten, and whose fruit is cast or withered. There is, away in the Eastern hemisphere, a body of water, whose surface the winds and storms of heaven never ruffle; its outward form is always the same. But those waters are black, and bitter, and heavy; no living thing is in them; and beneath them are unseparated Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities of the plain: they call it the Dead Sea. So a Church may have an outward uniformity, and boast of its unchanging forms and ceremonies, and yet have no living thing within it. It may be like the garnished sepulchers of the Jews, beautiful in outward appearance, and within the dwelling-place of death. When the visible Church, of any form or order, is unduly exalted, and its ceremonies and government too highly valued, the only source of spiritual life, and the only means of spiritual growth, are likely to be neglected. When the gold seems greater than the temple which sanctified the gold, then the evidence of union with Christ is incomplete: for he is not the head of any particular visible church, but only of the Church invisible and universal. And all true believers seek their spiritual life in him, by direct and intimate commerce of the soul with the spirit, not through any human mediations, or church order, or sacraments, or rites and forms of worship.

It may be inferred from this subject, that the peculiar glory of the Church of Christ, consists in the growth and increase of the divine life, in the individual members of it. In order to secure this increase, the vital union of the soul to Christ must be appre-

hended as a divine truth. He must be regarded as the only source of spiritual life, which flows into his people only as they seek a closer union with him. To grow into his divine likeness, to possess a greater sympathy and similarity of character with him, will enable his people most effectually to declare the excellency and power of real Christianity. As they are drawn into closer union with him, they will more readily acknowledge his right to their whole being. They will feel the force of the apostle's exhortation: "I beseech you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your *bodies a living sacrifice*, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service." Then, too, will that great truth become more practical and significant, which declares: Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost, whom ye have received from God; and ye are not your own; for ye are bought with the price of Christ's blood. Glorify God, therefore, with your body and spirit, which are God's by creation, and redemption, and habitation."

It may be inferred also, from the nature of religious life and its essential forms, that the spiritual power of God's people diminishes as they exalt the forms and order of a visible Church. The graces of the spirit, the virtues of a good character, find not their nourishment in mere carnal observances, in pomp and show, in festival and fast, in imposing rights and ceremonies. Such is not the food by which spiritual natures grow. The forms, therefore, which may be needful to a visible church organization, ought to be as few and simple as possible. Religion, in its true character, is pre-eminently spiritual; and it appears most advantageously, both in individuals and churches, in the garments of simplicity. Whatever of form tends to excite wonder and admiration, tends also to deaden the religious sense; to draw the mind from spiritual things to sensible; from the substance to the form; from the only source of life to the mere elements of death. The spiritual life of the Church, as it has had visibility in the world, has been wasted, as its outward pomp, and showy ceremonies, its worldly state and riches were increased. For then the true spiritual temple was no longer regarded as greater than the gold of the temple, and its manifold adornments. When the Church was in the wilderness, persecuted and driven from the abodes of men, and had its places of worship in the caves of the eternal mountains, lifting to God the voice of prayer and praise only in the night-watches, it possessed a far higher degree of spirituality, and greater means and power of doing good, than when it found a stately repose in vast cathedrals, and multiplied its services, and, by costly array and outward show, attracted the multitude to its formal worship. And so it is that the gold and goodly stones and gifts of the temple are of little value, if God no longer dwell therein. His presence is the glory of his spiritual house; and nothing more is needed for its perfection.

It may be inferred also, that there is a sense in which there can be no salvation out of the Church. This declaration can be true only as applied to the Church universal and invisible. This, doubtless, was its signification in its early use. It is wholly devoid of truth when uttered in reference to any visible Church, and is the contracted thought of unscriptural sectarianism. For the Church, in its highest significance, as the idea of it is developed by inspiration, embraces all who are united to Christ by a living faith—that great multitude out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation, who have been redeemed unto God by the blood of the Lamb. This noble and innumerable community, the apostles and martyrs of the early Church, the disciples of all times and of every name, those who have been found in palaces and in dens and caves of the earth; these are the Church of God, which he has purchased with his own blood. These are the living stones of his spiritual house, where he dwells, and in which incense and a pure offering, and all spiritual sacrifices shall be offered continually, to his holy and glorious name.

SERMON XXIV.

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THE PENITENT THIEF.

"AND one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."
—LUKE 23 : 39-43.

THE malefactor, whose repentance is here described, bad as his life had been, was not ignorant of religious obligations. Being a Jew, he had been taught the laws of God, though he had sadly departed from them. He had, before that day, known of Christ and of the character of his claims, perhaps too of his miracles and the spirit of his teaching. But whether he had known much or little of Jesus, not being hardened in sin, like his companion, and being so near to death, all that he saw and heard in these eventful hours, would make a strong impression on him.

Thus, the way was, in some degree, prepared for his return to a better mind. Let us look at the mode of his conversion, and we shall see, though the circumstances are so briefly given, that it involved true repentance toward God and faith in the Saviour of sinners.

I. *In the first place, mark the malefactor's repentance.* It was occasioned by the cruel and impious behavior of his associate in crime. At least, the first expression of his penitence was in the form of a rebuke addressed to this heartless man. In a low and reckless spirit, he had joined with the scribes and elders in mocking Jesus. Some walked before the cross, shaking their heads with malicious glee, crying to Jesus to come down, if he could, and so prove himself the Son of God. They taunted him with having threatened to destroy the temple in three days, and with having called himself the King of Israel. If he was really so great, why not show a little of his power? why not begin by saving his own life? "He saved others; himself he cannot save," was the contemptuous shout. Was it not the height of absurdity that one competent to be a Saviour should himself die? What motive could he have for submitting to death but a lack of strength to deliver himself? "He trusted in God," they said with scorn, pointing to Jesus; "let him deliver him now, if he cares for him!" "And one of the malefactors which were hanged, railed at him, saying, if thou be Christ, save thyself and us." He fell in with the rabble who were scoffing at Jesus, and challenged him, with an incredulous sneer, to put forth his power for the rescue of all three. So far was he from all serious thought of his own situation, and so dead to every kind feeling. It was that moral stupidity and stubborn indifference to their own fate, which the worst criminals not seldom exhibit even in the hour of death. In the little remnant of life that remained to him, he would divert himself at the expense of his fellow-sufferer. But the other malefactor felt very differently. It was no time, he thought, to jeer at another's distress. It was no time to make merry; least of all, did it become them to revile one who was in the same situation as themselves. "Dost not thou fear God," he said, "seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss." It was a rebuke which he had a full right to utter; for the other had included him in his mocking petition: "If thou be Christ, save thyself and us!" He would wash his hands of all participation in this request. He had no sympathy with the levity that prompted it. He was struck with the inhumanity of his comrade's behavior. In the same condemnation with Jesus, undergoing the same dreadful death, it seemed a brutal thing to side with his enemies and turn upon him in their

bitter spirit. In this awful position, victims together, they ought surely to spare one another. In this earnest remonstrance, we discern a recognition of the law of love. There was an outgoing of sympathy for Christ, and of compassion. There was a kind of fellowship with his suffering; a reaction against his companion's disposition to set himself apart from Christ; a recoil from the selfish and unsympathetic temper which he had manifested. Even this part of the rebuke shows in the repenting malefactor, in contrast with the other, a sober tone of feeling; a sense of the fearful circumstances in which they were placed, and it seems to show, too, the awakening of better affections in his heart. The frivolous and unfeeling deportment of his companion broke the tie between them; he could not go with him any farther, but felt moved warmly to rebuke his sin. He did more, however, than remind him that they were all in the same condemnation. "We indeed," he added, "justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this man hath done nothing amiss." How simple and explicit is this confession of ill-desert! Christ was innocent; he had committed no fault, and did not deserve to die on the cross. But as for them, they could say nothing against the judgment pronounced upon them; they could not complain that they were put to this anguish; they had brought this penalty upon themselves, and it was not too great for their guilt. The repenting malefactor gives the highest expression to the sense of right, when he approves of his own punishment. Plato wrote that a just man would rather be punished, in case he has broken the law, than escape, even if he had the power. The dying thief came near this lofty standard when he acquiesced in the course of justice, and submitted with a humble and uncomplaining mind, to a lingering death. He could not have uttered these words at the moment when he was suffering the sharp torture, if he had not seen his crimes in their proper light. He took a true view of his past life, a true view of his own character, and of punishment as the righteous consequence of sin. Looking back on the sinful course he had taken, and contrasting himself with the holy Being at his side, he could only say, "We receive the due reward of our deeds;" "we have been evil-doers and deserve to perish in this way; they are doing no wrong to us, though they are to him; for he has done nothing amiss. He is not like us; we are bad men, not fit to live; it is quite right that we should suffer." But the penitent's change of mind was a repentance toward God. It was not merely the conviction that he had transgressed a righteous human law. It was something far deeper than an amiable sympathy with a fellow-sufferer. "*Dost thou not fear God, seeing that we are in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly.*" The fear of God had entered into his heart; and it was the sin of his companion in the sight of God that called out his rebuke. There was a great dishonor offered to God in keeping up this careless and profane

temper at such a time when they were soon to stand in his awful presence. It was most irreverent to be thus reckless, when *He* was inflicting upon them the penalty of their iniquities. For to the government of God *they* were paying the due reward of their deeds; it was his Providence which had brought them to merited punishment. It is clear that the penitent malefactor looked through the human instrumentalities by which he had been condemned and punished, to God whose judgment was reflected in their act. "Dost thou not fear God?" was his question. "God, who has made us to feel his power and justice; whom we have so grievously offended? Is it not high time to leave off our ungodly ways, and to tremble before him? Do you not fear to go on reviling, when his hand is upon you?"

Thus we find in this brief remonstrance the elements of true repentance, the recognition of God's authority, the sincere acknowledgment of ill-desert, the disposition to sin no more. It matters not what words are used, how few or how many, if these feelings are in the heart. Our sins must be condemned and humbly confessed and given up, out of regard to God.

II. Observe now, secondly, the faith of the dying penitent. "And he said unto Jesus," whether immediately or some time after, we are not told, "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom." He was acquainted, as he might easily be, with the declarations of Christ in regard to his future coming with power and glory; and now, under the impression which the whole scene made on him, he believed them. He knew not how or when the great event denoted in his prayer was to occur; he had indistinct ideas on the subject, and so have we. But the time was coming when the power and sovereignty that belonged to Jesus would be made manifest to the universe. It would be seen that his death was not due to the want of power to save himself; that dominion belonged to him. They who now derided his weakness, would behold his authority and might. They would see him enthroned in his kingdom and judging the world in righteousness. This great truth the penitent thief believed. It was a noble exercise of faith. Remember that he saw Jesus at the lowest point of his humiliation, forsaken of his disciples, passive and unresisting in the hands of his enemies, pursued with blows and insults, and expiring like himself. Yet he pierced through these clouds that veiled his glory; he felt the majesty of his character, and believed. If it is sometimes difficult for *us* to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, now that he has risen from the dead and the Gospel has wrought its wonders in the world, how much more, one would think, it would be for the thief on the cross. Surely he deserves the highest place among the heroes of faith whom the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews, in his eleventh chapter, has immortalized.

But his faith was more than a discernment that Jesus was indeed the Messiah and the Saviour of man. He applied to Christ for mercy, and for a place among his people. And this he did in the simple language of the heart: "Lord, remember me when thou comest in thy kingdom!" That is, "remember me then, to protect and bless me!" When the great day of His kingdom should come, he besought Jesus not to overlook him; not to leave him to perish. He would fain commit himself and his eternal interest to the sufferer at his side, resting the hope of his departing soul upon him. And thus among the harsh tones of priest and soldier, there came to the ear of Christ the voice of one humble suppliant for pardon and grace. How are the horrors of that scene, as we think of it, relieved by this beautiful event! The thief, whom they have crucified with Jesus in order to render his death the more ignominious and so, once for all, to suppress his cause, becomes a penitent disciple—an example of the truth that God makes the wrath of man to praise him. On the cross itself, the promise began to be fulfilled: "And I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." Jesus replied to the petition. The scoffs and imprecations which were addressed to him, he had heard in silence—a silence broken once by his prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!" But the request of the penitent malefactor, he made no delay to answer. "Jesus said unto him, Verily, I say unto thee, to-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." It was an answer that far exceeded the petition; a blessing greater than the penitent had dared to ask or think. He was not left to look forward to a remote hereafter—being in the long interval either unconscious or in a state of suffering. That very day, when the soul should leave the body, he was to enter, in company with Christ, into the abode of the blest. The Jews meant by "Paradise" the dwelling place of departed saints prior to the resurrection; or, as we should say, the condition of the happy dead before the consummation of all things, when they will assume the glorified body appropriate to the new heavens and the new earth. For the Scriptures teach us that the human race is not to continue forever; that this world, or present state of things, will come to an end; and the great and mysterious events, which are to attend the closing scene, will bring to the redeemed an accession of glory and happiness. When the Saviour said to the penitent thief, "This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise," he employed the word in the usual sense. The malefactor was not to wait until the demonstration of the Messiah's authority, the solemn judgment of the world, the resurrection, but he was to begin the heavenly life at once, and in due time was to share with all the good, in its transition to higher forms of blessedness. Pause for a moment and consider the remarkable words of Jesus. He answered a prayer for salvation with a confident and authoritative promise.

He disposed of the lot of a human being in the eternal world which they were both so soon to enter. He forgave his sin. He assured him of an admission to the joys of heaven. Now who was he who thus assumed to exercise a divine prerogative and to speak for God? Had he the right so to speak? If not, he was under the most monstrous delusion that ever the distempered fancy of men harbored. That he, a dying man, faint and suffering, knowing that his end is near, should imagine himself endowed with the power to allot to mortals their destiny in the life to come! That he—so clear in his perception of truth, so sober in judgment and self-possessed, so humble before God, so willing to forego honors and distinction, free from the blinding influence of sin, spotless in his holiness—that he should be insanely self-deceived! That, even in the awful hour of death he should cherish the mad dream of a weak enthusiast! That he should arrogate to himself a position and rights which no mortal can claim, and expire in the crazy persuasion that they are his—opening his eyes in the other world to find that he has lived under a miserable illusion! Is it credible that he, the calm teacher who spake with a clear wisdom which no other man has approached, the meek and lowly friend, the prayerful servant of God, the only perfect example—was misled by a delirious fancy? Can we believe it of him? Could we believe it, even if we knew not that he rose from the dead; that he has changed the whole current of history and became the author of a new spiritual life to myriads—enabling them to escape from sin, and the bondage of fear, and to enjoy the liberty of God's children? Was he the dupe of a disordered imagination—then the rabble at the foot of the cross who mocked him, and they who put the crown of thorns on his head, were in the right, and the penitent thief offered his prayer in vain: his spirit may have been better, but the impenitent malefactor took the true view of Christ. We feel that the intuition of that repenting soul was not false. We knew in whom he believed. The Redeemer, to whom he committed himself, was able to save him and to keep his promise. For "all power is given to him in heaven and in earth." And he who "for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame," is "set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

From the text we may infer the consoling truth that the disciples of Christ when they die, go where he is and enter upon a conscious and happy existence.

The idea is sometimes broached that death is followed by a long sleep, an interval of unconsciousness, which may last for ages. On this subject, we are shut up to the teachings of the Bible. Faint, indeed, is the light to be derived from any other source. And the Scriptures do not sanction this idea. The dying thief was to go at once to the abodes of the good and there meet the

Saviour. There is no reason to suppose that he is an exception among the disciples of Christ, or that his destiny was peculiar. It is evident that the Apostle Paul looked for an immediate union to Christ at the moment of death. Life in the body was absence from Christ. He desired to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better for his own happiness than to live. He speaks of death as a *departure* from the body to Christ. In these and many like passages, the doctrine is clear that death brings the believer at once to the enjoyment of his reward. And this truth is more consonant with reason, and, it need not be said, more grateful to our feelings than the idea before named. The rest that remaineth for the people of God is not a lifeless slumber, even for a period, but a discharge from burdensome care, a freedom from weariness and fear, an active and joyous use of all the powers of their nature.

Secondly. How simple is the way of life to one who desires to return to God! He has only to confess and forsake his sin, and look to Christ with one heart-felt prayer. The hopes of the Gospel are within his reach, the instant he is ready to do this. If he is willing to acknowledge his unworthiness, if he is willing to give up the world and live for something better, there is mercy for him and grace to help. Is it hard to exercise trust in the Saviour and believe that God will receive you as a child? Think of the solicitude of the prodigal's father in the parable, and of the welcome which he gave to his unworthy son! Think of the joy there is in heaven over one sinner that repenteth! Above all, think of Jesus, the Friend of sinners, patient under all the indignities that were heaped upon him, his love not exhausted, but interceding on the cross for his enemies, and cheering the poor thief with the promise of eternal life! See there the Father's love, who "spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him for us all," not for the dying thief alone, but *for us all*! Remember that "faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." He was sent to save, not to condemn. And he will cast off none who apply to him, as did the penitent on the cross.

But simple as the act of repentance and trust is, it is not safe to delay the performance of it. The malefactor was pardoned and saved at the very end of life, but none of us can plead his example as an excuse for postponing his duty. No one can draw from this event the hope that he can make his peace with God and give himself to Christ on his death-bed. Let him who indulges this hope not forget that the malefactor, in all probability, had never deliberately put off his duty to the time of his death. Had he known much of the Gospel, and, hearing its call, refused to comply with it, putting off his obedience as long as possible, the result, we have reason to think, would have been different.

His case, then, affords no support to one who looks forward to his death-bed, intending to live without God and get the pleasures of sin as long as he can, and then, at the last moment, to grasp the promises of the Gospel. Had he taken this course, he would, it is likely, have grown more and more insensible to the truth, more and more hardened in his love to the world, and would have died as he had lived. Such is the effect on the heart of pushing off an obligation known and felt, from so selfish a motive. It breaks down a man's self-respect, weakens conscience, confirms the will in its slavery to sin, and so takes away the power to reform.

Let one who is inclined to defer repentance, also remember that two thieves were crucified with Jesus. If one of them became contrite, the other did not. The other was unmoved at the prospect of death, perhaps unable to realize that death was near; or unable to dispel his frivolous tone of feeling; or having an infidel heart as a consequence of his ungodly life. Whatever the cause, he confessed no sin, he uttered no prayer, he uttered no word but a scoff. What does his example teach? Let it not be forgotten that if death brought salvation to one, it brought perdition to another.

And who shall assure us that we are not to die suddenly, without a warning? Who shall guarantee that in our last days and hours, we shall be possessed of reason, that we shall be able to reflect or put forth a mental effort of any kind? Ah! when the hour of death shall come, if thought is then awake, will not remorse for a life wasted, for opportunities to repent thrown away, crowd out every other emotion? When a duty is seen, then is the time to perform it; when the obligation is felt, then is the moment to comply with it; when the call of God in the Gospel is addressed to us, then is the occasion to yield obedience, for the future is not ours. We only know that he who puts off the performance of his first and great duty, incurs a fearful risk—for God is not mocked; "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."